

## LITURGY IN THE THEOLOGY OF ST. THOMAS

SINCE LITURGY became respectable there have been numerous attempts to write a theology of it. Obviously one can, and does nowadays, write a theology of almost anything—from history to revolution, from leisure to clothes, from sin to sport. But when liturgy is recognized to mean the substance no less than the shape of the Church's worship it becomes imperative to examine it on a theological level. In its program for liturgical studies Vatican II puts the theological aspect of the subject in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

The literary form of theological studies on the liturgy can be the theological monograph or some chapters in a book that also deals with liturgy on other levels—historical, pastoral, spiritual, ceremonial, aesthetic. These forms have, of necessity, to take a great deal for granted about theology. They apply theological categories, principles, and presuppositions to the subject in hand without having the time or space to analyze or evaluate them. Their theological assumptions are often unspoken or barely confessed. If theology were being done within a single tradition, where there is general agreement on principles and presuppositions, there might be no cause for concern here. But in an era of theological pluralism and inter-Church debate one cannot presume such agreement. If the writer on liturgy does not declare his standpoint and explain his theological horizon he will find it difficult to engage in theological debate about liturgy, as about anything else, with those who stand outside his tradition. And he will say nothing much of interest to those who stand outside the ground of faith and who would require the liturgical life of the church to be submitted to some kind of rational verification.

<sup>1</sup> Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 16, 23.

It might be claimed that contemporary theology of the liturgy avoids the pitfalls of pluralism by going back to categories that are predominantly biblical and patristic. Apart from the fact that these are the indispensable source categories of revelation, they predate the dogmatic disputes of the churches and the theological particularism of the schools and are generally accepted by all Christians. However, the course of contemporary theology surely shows that what is built from a common fund of biblical and traditional material is inevitably influenced by the dogmatic and philosophical stance of different writers. A theologian of the liturgy who is honest about his hermeneutical presuppositions will not be deceived by a convergence of terminology. In any case, the critical and rational function of theology and its task of building a bridge between faith and the capital of human thought require it to verify the ontological ground of revealed ideas. The fact that the Bible records the belief of a group of people in God and gives details of their worship is no guarantee that there is any such thing as God in reality; their belief that the mystery of salvation is embodied in certain events, persons or rituals is of itself no guarantee that the divine can be contacted by the human through created intermediaries. A theology of the liturgy that limits itself to a biblical and traditional explanation of the Church's worship offers a specious prospect for communication between religious men and can leave the liturgy defenceless and threatened with absurdity in the face of rational humanistic criticism.

An alternative theological approach to the liturgy is to situate the subject within a comprehensive theology, a theology which is dealing in the broadest possible way with God and his relationship to the created order. Such a theology will have to analyze and justify its own basic assumptions about God and man. If it is Christian theology it will have to examine the historical working out of the relationship between God and man and explain how it culminates in Christ. Then, with its theological, anthropological, and christological presuppositions confessed and defended it will come to examine the place of the Church and its liturgy in the actual bringing about of that rela-

lionship. The fact that few contemporary theologians are prepared to attempt such a comprehensive task is less a sign of the impossibility or undesirability of the project than of the priority that has to be given at present to assembling and assimilating the vast store of source material that has been presented to the systematic theologian by biblical, patristic, and historical studies of all kinds. Meantime, however, it should be interesting and methodologically instructive to look at how the task was accomplished at an earlier age of theology.

St. Thomas did not write a theology of the liturgy. His thinking about liturgical matters is to be found mainly in his comprehensive theological works—in the two *Summas* and in his commentary on the *Sentences*. It is found there, not in the form of a block of material that could be called a theology of the liturgy, or even a theological tract on the liturgy. When he comes to deal with the core of the Church's liturgy, in his discussion of the sacraments towards the end of the *Tertia Pars*, he is not opening up a new tract but simply coming in his own good time to discuss the actual working out of the relationship between God and his creation that has been the subject of his singleminded study from the first questions of the *Prima Pars*. Throughout the *Summa* he is writing theology pure and simple, not the theology of this or that. He does not present a theology of the liturgy but incorporates liturgy in his theology.<sup>2</sup> He examines the actual practice of the Church, as he knew it, in the light of the general principles he has established about God and man, the possible relationship between them, and the historical phases of that relationship that have a bearing on present reality (creation, original justice and sin, the Old Law, the community of salvation, Christ, the Church). These principles and historical precedents are his presuppositions. They have been critically examined and explained throughout the *Summa*. Now they are being used to provide a theological interpretation of liturgical data. One may disagree with his principles. But at least one knows what they

Hence the title of this article.

are. And one has been invited to debate them to the ultimate limits of dogmatic and philosophical enquiry.

The working out of these theological presuppositions by St. Thomas is not entirely independent of the data that they are ultimately employed to interpret. The given norm of the theological endeavor is the life of the believing community. The theologian must know the expression which the faith of the community finds in its Scriptures, Creeds, and liturgy. He must be aware, too, of the direction which the contemporary community is taking in its attempts to realize its belief and its hope in a constantly evolving human situation. This datum, which is the expression of Revelation, is sovereign in theology. The theologian who does not begin his work by listening to it risks wandering off on irrelevant, a prioristic speculation. And, if he ever does get back to employing the speculative principles he works out to the life of his contemporary Church, he may find himself at variance with its beliefs and practices and the directions these are taking in the world of his day. If, for example, a theologian found himself committed to a religious anthropology which held that ritual symbolical activity is unworthy of man in his dealings with God, he would find himself embarrassed by the sacramental practice and beliefs of the Church.

There is good reason for claiming that St. Thomas gives due theological weight to liturgical data.<sup>3\*</sup> In his treatment of the sacraments the *usus* or *consuetudo Ecclesiae*, the *ritus ab Ecclesia servatus* is a solid unquestioned *auctoritas*.|| If objections

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. Borobia, "La liturgia come lugar teológico en la teología sacramentaria de santo Tomás," in *Miscelanéa P. Cuervo* (Salamanca, 1970), 229-254; Y. Congar, O. P., "Faits, problèmes et réflexions à propos du pouvoir d'ordre et des rapports entre le presbytérat et l'épiscopat," in *La Maison Dieu* 14 (1948), 107-128; H. Hering, "De loco theologico liturgiae apud S. Thomam," in *Pastor Bonus* 5 (1941), 456-464; F. Marin-Sola, O. P., *L'Évolution homogène du dogme catholique* (Fribourg, 1924). Tome I, p. 291 sq.

\* To take the *Summa Theologiae* alone cf. II, q. 60, a. 8; q. 66, a. 10; q. 72, a. 4 sed contra.; q. 72, a. 12 sed contra.; q. 73, a. 1 sed contra.; q. 73, a. 2 ad 1; q. 75, a. 2; q. 76, a. 8 sed contra.; q. 78, a. 6 sed contra.; q. 79, a. 3, obj. 1; q. 79, a. 5 sed contra.; q. 80, a. 12 sed contra.; q. 82, a. 2; q. 83, a. 2; q. 83, a. 3 sed contra.; q. 83, a. 4; q. 83, a. 5 sed contra.

suggest a conflict between principle and practice, it is the principle that has to be adjusted. In his more abstract theological investigations he is also ready to appeal to liturgical practice and texts for confirmation of his options.<sup>6</sup> And there is an even more basic indication that St. Thomas builds his theological edifice from its very foundations towards an eventual understanding of Christian liturgy. In the general prologue to the *Summa* he explains "propositum nostrae intentionis in hoc opere est ea quae ad *christianam religionem* pertinent . . . tradere." When he further specifies that "principalis intentio huius sacrae doctrinae est Dei cognitionem tradere, et non solum secundum quod in se est, sed etiam secundum quod est principium rerum et finis earum, et specialiter rationalis creaturae" <sup>7</sup> he is maintaining his concern for *religio*. In abstract terms he understands *religio* to mean "ordo ad Deum" of those things which take their origin from him.<sup>7</sup> In concrete terms *religio* is man's *ordo ad Deum* worked out historically until it is fulfilled in Christ and mediated to mankind in the "cultus Dei secundum ritum *christianae religionis*."<sup>8</sup> This *religio* is the subject matter of his theology. His method, beginning as he does with God and proceeding to examine the *exitus* of all things from him and their *reditus* to him, provides a profoundly theological perspective for understanding liturgy. Movement from God to man and back to God is the fundamental pattern of liturgy. A liturgist, then, is entitled to claim that, even in the most abstract speculations of St. Thomas, presuppositions are being established and ideas forged which will be readymade for an eventual theological explanation of the Church's worship.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I, q. 28, a. 7; q. 25, a. 8 obj. 1; q. 28, a. 2; q. 52, a. 1 sed contra.; I-II, q. 103, a. 3 ad 4; q. 113, a. 9 sed contra.; II-II q. 82, a. 3 ad 2; q. 82, a. 4; q. 83, a. 17; HI, q. 27, a. 1 sed contra.; q. 27, a. 2 ad 3; q. 31, a. 5 obj. 1.

<sup>7</sup> I, q. 2, prologus.

<sup>8</sup> II-II, q. 81, a. 1.

<sup>9</sup> 8m, q. 63, a. 2.

<sup>10</sup> For an historical survey of the relationship between liturgy and theology, with a list of contemporary works on the subject, cf. P. Fernandez, "Liturgia y

In fact, most of the theologies of the liturgy that already exist within the Catholic tradition are happy to claim support from St. Thomas. They use his ideas and principles in varying degrees. However, it may be worth asking whether any of them represents St. Thomas' deepest theological thinking about liturgy. These theologies can be characterized by the key idea which they select as the starting-point for understanding liturgy. One will usually find this at the heart of the "definition" they offer of the liturgy. While few of these writers would claim to be giving a definition that measures up to all the technical requirements of logical definition they usually do attempt a concise, orderly statement of what they consider to be the essential features of liturgy.<sup>10</sup> The key idea in some of these definitions is worship, *cultus*; in others it is sign, *signum*; still others define liturgy in terms of the priesthood of Christ. While each of these ideas is prominent in St. Thomas's thinking about liturgy, one is entitled to ask which, if any of them, represents his most basic insight on the subject. They can be examined in turn. If none of them proves entirely satisfactory, another idea will need to be put forward and its claim to bring the full weight of St. Thomas's theology to bear on the liturgy justified. Such an idea will put one in touch with the ultimate presuppositions of his theological thinking about the liturgy. And it will mark the point at which dialogue might be undertaken with those outside the thomistic tradition, whether within the Catholic Church or outside it, and a basis offered for an intellectual justification of Catholic liturgy to non-believers.

### *Liturgical Material*

Before various definitions of the liturgy are examined in the

Teologia. La historia de un problema metodológico" in *Cienciencia Tomista* 99 (1972), 135-179. This article deals at some length with the position of St. Thomas.

10 Cf. *Introduction to the Liturgy* (English transi. of Part One of *L'Eglise en prière*, 3rd edit., edited by A. G. Martimort), Shannon, 1968, 1-12; H. Schmidt, S. J., *Introductio in Liturgiam Occidentalem* (Herder, 1960), 47-87; J. H. Miller, C. S. C., "The Nature and Definition of the Liturgy," in *Theological Studies* 18 (1957), 325-356.

way that has been proposed a preliminary word has to be said about what is being defined. For purposes of comparison one must be sure that the ideas being put forward are all meant to define the same thing, since any debate about definition supposes agreement on the material or objects to be covered by the definition. And if one is appealing to ideas taken from an author of the past, such as St. Thomas, one has to establish that he was dealing with the same range of material. Otherwise his ideas cannot be compared with those of the present.

From the time the word liturgy came to be used in its modern sense there has in fact been some uncertainty about what precisely should be covered by it. Nowadays, however, there seems to be general agreement to let the teaching authorities of the Church be the arbiters of what is liturgical and what is not. The official liturgical books of the Church separate liturgies from *pia exercitia* or private devotions. Of course, the frontier between the two areas shifts from time to time, and some ceremonies may find themselves now at one side now at the other. The *sensus fidelium* has a legitimate right to (dialogue with the Magisterium on these matters. The theologian, for his part, will try to work out criteria to help the Magisterium decide what is liturgical and what is not. But at the beginning of his work he must adopt a provisional classification of liturgical material based on the practice of his contemporary Church. At the present day he will take as his guideline the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II, with the various instructions and liturgical books that have been issued to implement it. This is the material that contemporary definitions of the liturgy will want to make intelligible.

The liturgical material which St. Thomas considered was presented to him by the legislation and practice of the mediaeval Latin Church. It was not the most enlightened period of liturgical history. The tradition had become somewhat narrow and static. There was not a great deal of historical information available, and the criterion of development was

canonical precedent rather than living tradition. Allegorical interpretation tended to obscure the real meaning of liturgical forms. A clerical and monastic bias left little room for active ceremonial participation in the the liturgy by the laity. St. Thomas was certainly influenced and limited by prevailing attitudes and practices. But one can hardly claim that he deviates substantially from the essential liturgical tradition of the Church. All the main elements that we now recognize as liturgical—the seven sacraments, the prayer of the hours, the main feasts of the calendar, and the architectural, artistic, and musical setting of these activities—are certainly identified by him as special subjects of theological analysis. He attempts to cope with such historical material as was available to him;<sup>11</sup> he recognizes the legitimacy of the Greek rite;<sup>12</sup> his commentaries on the ritual of sacraments are quite realistic, with only occasional concessions to allegory;<sup>13</sup> his discussions on the *subjectum* (i.e., recipient) of sacraments and on the sacramental character show a fundamentally sound appreciation of the need for active participation,<sup>14</sup> and therefore for what he calls the *solemnitas*<sup>15</sup> built around the essential core of liturgical signs. A contemporary liturgist, then, can identify quite well with St. Thomas's choice of liturgical material. He can feel confident that ideas used by St. Thomas to understand the *ritus christianae religionis* are relevant to his own field of investigation.

<sup>11</sup> There are frequent references to earlier liturgical legislation in his sacramental theology. Among the admittedly rare attempts he makes to explain the historical evolution of a liturgical practice cf. III, q. 80, a. 10 ad 5; a. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Baptism—III, q. 60, a. 8; cf. q. 66, a. 5 ad 1; Eucharist—II, q. 74, a. 4; cf. *Cont. Errores Graecorum*—II, 28; for a general remark supporting the principle of liturgical pluralism cf. *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 93, a. 1 ad 3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. for example his analysis of the eucharistic liturgy in *Summa Theol.*, II, q. 83, a. 4. On the reaction against allegory spearheaded by St. Albert the Great cf. J. Jungmann, S. J., *Missarum Sollemnia*, vol. 1, english transi, p. 113. Jungmann, however, claims that the *Summa* still makes too many concessions to allegorism, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. C. O'Neill, O. P., "The role of the recipient and sacramental signification" in *The Thomist* 21 (1958), 257-31, 508-540.

<sup>15</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 2 ad 1; q. 66, a. 10; q. 72, a. 4.



*Liturgy as worship*

Once it was established that liturgy was something more than the Church's external pomp and circumstance, to be defined descriptively, liturgists began to search for its deeper theological meaning. In constructing their theological definitions of the liturgy they turned first to the notion of *cultus* (cult, worship) i.e. Here was a ready-made idea, with profound theological resonances, which seemed to give its essential theological intelligibility to liturgical activity. A thorough analysis of cult was available in St. Thomas's treatment of the virtue of religion. His ideas were gratefully employed in working out the implications of defining liturgy in terms of worship.<sup>17</sup> His thinking on the relationship between internal and external worship was considered particularly valuable. There could be little danger of reducing liturgy to external ceremonial when one conceived cult as a personal moral act of the virtue of religion. To say liturgy was cult was to say it was primarily an interior relationship with God; all its external features were meant to serve that relationship.

There is little doubt that the notion of cult is essential to a theological understanding of liturgy. But whether it is the best starting point for such an understanding may be questioned. Some theologians are slightly suspicious of it insofar as it is a "rational" notion, derived from a philosophico-ethical analysis of the relationship between man and God.<sup>18</sup> This objection has some weight if the idea of worship is being put forward as an a priori concept from which one claims to deduce the reality of Christian liturgy. But when it is simply being used, and used analogically, to provide an understanding of the given

<sup>17</sup> There is a comprehensive list of these definitions in Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-60.

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Hanssens, "De Natura Liturgiae ad mentem S. Thomae," in *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica* 24 (1935), 127\*-165\*; J. Menessier, O. P., "L'idée du sacré et le cult d'après S. Thomas," in *Rev. des Sc. Phil. et Theol.* 19 (1930), 63-82 and "Les réalités sacrées dans le cult chrétien," *ibid.* 20 (1931), 276-286, 453-471; J. Lécuyer, "Réflexions sur la théologie du cult selon saint Thomas," in *Revue Thomiste* 55 (1955), 839-862.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Introduction to the Liturgy* (Martimort), pp. 183-186.

reality of Christian liturgy, which is what St. Thomas is doing, one can have little ground for complaint—unless one is prepared to discredit the whole idea of a philosophical theology.

A more serious difficulty about the use of cult as the generic element in the definition of liturgy is that it gives first place to what may be called the upward movement of the liturgy (from man to God) and does not make explicit its downward movement (from God to man). Certainly any Christian idea of worship carries an implicit awareness of the movement from God to man, because it comes out of a background of belief that in the order of grace nothing can come from man that has not first been put there by God. But it is one thing to say grace is a prerequisite for liturgy, quite another to say that grace is actually given in and through the liturgy. A definition which does not make the sanctifying power of the liturgy explicit would seem to be inadequate. It is worth remembering that when the notion of cult was first employed to define the liturgy there was still some uncertainty about whether and in what sense the sacraments belonged to liturgy.<sup>18</sup> The Mass easily earned its place because as a sacrifice it was obviously an act of worship. But as long as sacraments were conceived almost exclusively as means of sanctification their relevance to the liturgy was not immediately obvious. When the liturgical movement began to make it clear that all seven sacraments were liturgies, and together formed the very core of liturgy, the cult movement of the sacraments had to be recognized. But at the same time the sanctifying power associated with the sacraments had to be predicated of the liturgy as such. Now it has been found difficult to fit the idea of sanctification into a definition of liturgy which is committed to the idea of cult as its starting point. If one were looking to St. Thomas for guidance on how to do it one might note that when he comes to discuss what is now recognized as the heart of the liturgy, the sacraments, it is not to the notion of cult he first turns. Nor does he begin with the notion of sanctification: he

\*<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

refuses to define sacrament as a cause of grace. He opts instead for a more general idea, which will allow him later to coordinate cult and sanctification—the idea of sign.<sup>20</sup> And it is, in fact, with this very idea that some more recent theologians have begun their definitions of the liturgy.

### *Liturgy as Sign*

The notion of sign has been current in Latin sacramental theology at least since St. Augustine. After its prominence in St. Thomas it had a somewhat uncertain career. Because the Council of Trent was preoccupied with the causality of the sacraments, it tended to play down their sign value. It has never been easy to coordinate signification and causality in thinking about sacraments: the temptation, to which many of the Reformers seem to have succumbed, is to reduce their causality to that exercised by merely human signs. Post-Tridentine Catholic theology, taking no chances on the *ex opere operato* causality of the sacraments, did not make much use of the concept sign at the heart of its sacramental theology. Eventually the theories of Cardinal Billot on sacramental causality thrust the question of sign back into the center of the debate about sacraments. And modern personalist theologians have made sign once again a key feature of their explanation of sacraments.

The liturgical movement was obviously a force in the restoration of sign to sacramental thinking. Its pastoral instinct about the celebration of sacraments was confirmed by this kind of sacramental theory. But liturgists were more aware than most theologians that the sanctifying effect of sacraments took place in a context of worship. They were also more aware than most that the sanctification occurred not just in and through the essential matter and form of the sign but through the entire liturgical ritual. Hence it was natural that they would extend the notion of sign from sacramental theology to the theology of liturgy, and that they would come to define liturgy as a com-

<sup>20</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II, q. 60, a. 1

plex of signs that express and realize both sanctification and worship.<sup>21</sup>

Although it must be admitted that cult definitions of the liturgy are still more common than sign definitions, an indication of how theological thought on the matter is developing can be gained from a comparison of two major Church statements about the liturgy. The encyclical *Mediator Dei* defined the liturgy solely in terms of cult.<sup>22</sup> There is no mention of sign, nor does the idea get much prominence anywhere in the encyclical. Sanctification is not included in the definition, although it is dealt with elsewhere in the text. The corresponding passage of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* shows a definite development.<sup>23</sup> The double movement of the liturgy is explicitly recognized, and the notion of sign is introduced. The Council says explicitly that sanctification is done through signs; it does not say explicitly that worship is expressed by these same signs. However, in other passages where it is dealing with the worship movement of the liturgy the Council draws conclusions from the fact that the liturgy is a system of signs.<sup>24</sup> It seems to be quite in accordance with current Church teaching, therefore, to define liturgy as a complex of signs that simultaneously expresses and effects the sanctification of men by God and the worship of God by men.

21C. Vagaggini, O. S. B. *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, vol. 1 (translated from 2nd Italian edition of *Il senso teologico della Liturgia*) Collegeville, 1959, defines liturgy as "the complexus of the efficacious signs of the Church's sanctification and of her worship" (p. 17).

22 "Sacra igitur Liturgia cultum publicum constituit, quem Redemptor noster, Ecclesiae Caput, caelesti Patri habet; quemque christifidelium societas Conditor suo et per ipsum aeterno Patri tribuit; utque omnia breviter perstringamus, integrum constituit publicum cultum mystici Iesu Christi Corporis, Capitis nempe membrorumque eius" *Mediator Dei*, 20.

23 "Merito igitur Liturgia habetur vduti Iesu Christi sacerdotalis muneris exercitatio, in qua per signa sensibilia significatur et modo singulis proprio efficitur sanctificatio hominis, et a mystico Iesu Christi Corpore, Capite nempe eiusque membris integer cultus publicus exercetur." *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7. Cf. *Introduction to the Liturgy* (Martimort), pp. 4-6.

24 Nn. 21, 24, 53, 47, 59, 60, 122. The description of the Church itself as a sign, introduced in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2 and developed in *Lumen Gentium* adds considerably to the theological worth of the concept.

Such a definition can also claim to be faithful to St. Thomas, even more so than a definition in terms of cult alone. St. Thomas is far more aware of the double movement of the liturgy than is often supposed. He has a principle that in the use of the sacraments (i. e., in their liturgical celebration) two things have to be taken into account: divine worship and the sanctification of men—the first being from man to God, the second from God to man.<sup>25</sup> The fact that he defines sacraments as sign of sanctification has, perhaps, given the impression that sign is only applicable to the downward movement of the liturgy. But in his treatment of the virtue of religion he has already applied the concept to cult: exterior actions are signs of interior worship.<sup>26</sup> Sign-making activity is therefore both sanctification and worship. It is in his analysis of the sacramental character that St. Thomas most fully exploits the double movement of sign. The characters equip the Christian to make cultic signs, and it is precisely in those signs that he is sanctified.<sup>27</sup> A definition of liturgy, then, in terms of sign is very much in line with the theology of St. Thomas, and can be articulated theologically by means of his principles.

One may ask, however, whether sign is the first and most fundamental concept that St. Thomas would predicate of the liturgy. It is a concept that has the advantage of presenting liturgy as a distinctively human activity; it draws attention to the anthropological values of the liturgy; it justifies the pursuit of subjective satisfaction and self-expression. But liturgists, particularly when they are theologizing about their subject, have to reconcile the subjective, anthropological values of the liturgy with its objective, given structure. Liturgy is an objective divine reality and not merely the creation of man's religious subjectivity. There is a real danger that anything described

<sup>25</sup> "Dicendum quod in usu sacramentorum duo possunt considerari, scilicet cultus divinus, et sanctificatio hominis: quorum primum pertinet ad hominem per comparationem ad Deum, secundum autem e converso pertinet ad Deum per comparationem ad hominem." *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 60, a. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 7 and ad 2; q. 83, a. 12; q. 84, a. 2; q. 85, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. C. O'Neill, *art. cit.* in note 14.

as sign will be looked at merely from man's point of view, that its legitimacy and efficacy will be judged solely by its power to express his beliefs, feelings, and needs, that its conduct will be organized on a criterion of human satisfaction. The post-Tridentine theologians were not just tilting at windmills.

The simplest way to guard against this forgetfulness of the objective, given reality of the liturgy is to specify that the signs being talked about are instituted by God. That tempers the freedom allowed to man's subjectivity. But, apart from the fact that divine institution can be claimed for only a very limited area of the Church's actual liturgy, the notion of institution by itself may give the impression that the objective standing of the liturgy is based on little more than a juridical determination. A more comprehensive way of examining the question—and one in which the debate about institution finds a more profound context—is to consider the liturgy as mystery. The mystery theology initiated by Dom Odo Casel has drawn compelling attention to the objective reality that is realized in the rituals of Christian worship. The influence which the ideas introduced by Casel have had on the theology of the liturgy has gone a long way towards ensuring that the objective dimension of the liturgy will not be neglected. However, the notion of mystery is not of itself very helpful in the work of theological definition. Its biblical and patristic richness has to be translated into something more technically manageable, if it is to be used in general theology.<sup>28</sup> Out of the attempts to do this one thing at least has emerged, particularly in debates about the liturgy: the mystery can be explained in christological terms. To say the liturgy is a mystery is to say it is an act and presence of Christ. The specific act of Christ that has caught the attention of theologians of the liturgy in this context is his priestly act. The objective reality (mystery) of the liturgy is expressed by defining it as an act of Christ's priesthood.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Th. Filthaut, *La Théologie des mystères, exposé de la controverse* (Tournai: Desclée, 1954); J. Gaillard O. S. B., "La théologie des mystères," in *Revue Thomiste* 57 (1957), 510-551.

*Liturgy as priestly work of Christ*

Definitions of liturgy in terms of the priesthood of Christ have, in fact, been offered by many authors side by side with or as part of their cult and sign definitions.<sup>29</sup> The concept has found favor in official teaching. *Mediator Dei* uses it, although not as its principal definition of the liturgy.<sup>30</sup> Vatican II makes it the starting-point of its definition and deduces its judgment about the objective value and efficacy of the liturgy from it.<sup>81</sup> In both these documents the link between the priestly work of Christ and the liturgical activity of the Church is made by means of the head-member relationship within the mystical body. It is this relationship that allows one to see acts of the Church as acts of Christ and conversely find the priestly act of Christ visibly realized in liturgical signs.

St. Thomas would certainly approve of this way of explaining the objective reality of the liturgy. By defining the sacramental character as a sharing in the priesthood of Christ he provided a technical theological explanation of how human liturgical acts can be in reality acts of Christ the priest.<sup>82</sup> His series of questions in the *Summa* devoted to the position of Christ between his Father and the rest of mankind allows one to understand how the personal liturgy of Christ is the ground and prototype of the Christian liturgy.<sup>38</sup> Christ's subjection to the Father, his prayer, his priesthood, his being adored by us and accepted as our Mediator provide a christological articulation of the objective mystery which is entered into by the Church when it addresses itself to the Father in submission, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, and thereby achieves its own predestined adoption through Christ. The basis of the Church's union with Christ through bodily, institutional contact is developed in the analysis of the Mystical Body, and Christ's head-

<sup>29</sup> References in *Introduction to the Liturgy* (Martimort), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Mediator Dei*, n. 22.

<sup>81</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 3.

*Ibid.*, qq. 20-26.

ship over it.<sup>34</sup> A definition of the liturgy, then, in terms of the priesthood and headship of Christ can be given detailed technical precision from the resources provided by the christology of St. Thomas.

But there are features of the christology of St. Thomas which suggest that a definition of liturgy in terms of the grace, headship, and priesthood of Christ cannot be the last word about it. The created qualities and prerogatives of Christ's humanity can only be understood in relation to the Incarnation. His grace is measured by his divine sonship. The human power and authority which stems from his grace is ministerial and instrumental. The action by which he causes salvation is theandric. To explain the full objective mystery of the liturgy it is not enough to appeal to the human activity of Christ. One has to raise further questions about how this human activity is a manifestation and realization of divine activity. This, in turn, involves appealing to presuppositions about the nature of God and the nature of man.<sup>35</sup> A christology supposes a theology (including a theological anthropology). And for that very reason a christological definition of the liturgy supposes a theological one. Liturgy is the mystery of God before it is the mystery of Christ.

Certainly when liturgists are exploring the idea of mystery they admit that its ultimate explanation lies in God. But more often than not they seem to take God somewhat for granted. Even when they develop the trinitarian pattern of the liturgy they seldom go beyond an economic trinitarianism. It is arguable that St. Thomas would want to do more than this, that he would want to employ a strictly theological category to define the liturgy before specifying the christological property of it. In fact, some of his most basic statements about liturgy

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Thus St. Thomas establishes the *convenientia* of the Incarnation by showing how it accords with the nature of God as benevolent self-giving (*ibid.*, q. 1, a. 1) and the status of man as an embodied, sinful creature set in history (aa. 2-6). His views of God and man are the presuppositions which underlie all his christology. They have been critically established in the two earlier parts of the *Summa*.



come in the pre-christological level of his theology, both in the (*'outra Gentiles* and in the *Summa*. It is there that he gives his primary account of the objective divine dimension of the liturgy.

### *Liturgy as the Work of God*

Liturgists recall that in the Bible the word *mystery* originally meant the plan of God's wisdom for the salvation of mankind. It is this plan that is objectively embodied and revealed in the liturgy. St. Thomas discusses the objective institutions of liturgy in this very setting of the plan of God—technically under the heading of Providence. He situates the subject interestingly in the *Contra Gentiles*. In the course of a discussion on how Providence looks after rational creatures in a special way he introduces the concept of divine law.<sup>36</sup> Having explained how divine law provides for love and faith he goes on to explain why it also provides man with institutions of worship:

Since it is connatural to man to acquire knowledge through the senses, and since it is most difficult to arise above sensible things, divine providence has appointed sensible things as a reminder to man of things divine, so that thus man's intention might the more readily be recalled to divine things, not excluding the man whose mind is not equal to the contemplation of divine things in themselves. For this reason sensible sacrifices were instituted. . . . Again, sensible things are employed for man's sanctification, in the shape of washings, anointings, meat and drink, and the uttering of sensible words, as signifying to man that he receives intelligible gifts from an external source, and from God whose name is expressed by sensible words. Moreover, man performs certain sensible actions, not to arouse God but to arouse himself to things divine: such as prostrations, genuflections, raising the voice and singing. . . .<sup>37</sup>

It is also under the heading of law that he deals with the institutions of worship in the *Summa*. More than in the *Contra Gentiles* he deals with the actual historical liturgies that have been provided by God in the Old and New Laws. But a more significant advance in the *Summa* is the way in which he co-

.. *HI Contra Gentiles*, c. 114.

" *Ibid.*, c. 119.

ordinates the providence of Law with the providence of grace in his explanation of liturgy. This whole section of his theology is, in fact, an examination of the twofold way in which God is at work in man's search for self-fulfilment by law and by grace.<sup>38\*</sup> And while St. Thomas distinguishes the two levels of divine activity, he is very sensitive to their interaction and to the way the balance between them changes from the Old to the New Testament. This contrast between the Testaments, in terms of law and grace, is important for understanding his views on the liturgy. What he has to say about the worship of the New Law is expressed by way of comparison with the institutions of the Old Law. Consequently it is important to study his discussion of the *Praecepta Caeremonialia*, not alone for the valuable general insights it has into the dynamics of liturgy but because it provides the point of reference and the terminology for his study of Christian worship. Those who would relegate the long, forbidding questions on Old Testament ceremonial to the limbo of historical curiosities run the risk of misunderstanding St. Thomas's thinking about liturgy.<sup>38</sup>

By treating liturgy under the heading of law St. Thomas gives basic recognition to its communal, public character.<sup>40</sup> The institutions set up by law are social: they create the community and provide the objective setting and support in which the individual can practice virtue. Because the liturgical institutions of the Old Law are found in the Bible they are attributed to positive divine law.<sup>41</sup> They embody a revelation

<sup>38</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 90 prol.

<sup>39</sup> He deals with the liturgy of the Old Law in I-II, qq. 101-103 and with the liturgy of the New Law, *ibid.*, q. 108, aa. 1-2. On the historical background and methodology of his treatment cf. M.-D. Chenu, "La théologie de la loi ancienne selon saint Thomas," in *Revue Thomiste* 61 (1961), 485-497; Beryl Smalley, "William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1274. Commemorative Studies*. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (Toronto, 1974). Vol. 2, 11-72.

<sup>40</sup> "For a more general discussion on this point cf. C.-M. Travers, O.P. *Valeur Sociale de la Liturgie* (Lex Orandi 5) (Paris, 1946).

<sup>41</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 98, a. 2. It is because they are in the Bible that St. Thomas devotes so much space to the ceremonial precepts. He is a theologian who takes the Bible seriously, cf. Chenu, *art. cit.*

made to a particular people, who have a special role in the history of salvation, of how the general moral precept to worship (<>d should be concretely carried out.<sup>42</sup> Such an elaborate code was needed to protect them from idolatry and to encourage them to direct all their life to God.<sup>43</sup> But there is a second, even more fundamental reason why God should have legislated in such detail: the ceremonies of the Old Testament had to prefigure Christ.<sup>44</sup> St. Thomas considers that this reference to Christ has to be found in all liturgy, even in those extra-biblical liturgies which he believes can be legitimately created by prophetically inspired men.<sup>45</sup> It provides him with a fundamental explanation of why the ceremonies of the Old Law had to be replaced. They were signs of a Christ who was to come: they looked forward to him. Once he had come they were no longer truthful, no longer expressed the objective reality of salvation; they had to be replaced by commemorative signs, which looked back in faith and charity to the Christ who had come.<sup>46</sup>

The law-making activity of God, then, which gives external shape to liturgy, must be coordinated with his grace-giving activity. In Christ grace is objectively realized and available to humanity.<sup>47</sup> Hence, according to St. Thomas, the New Law is primarily a "lex indita," an inner enabling impulse of the Holy Spirit producing justification and virtue.<sup>48</sup> But the new dispensation does not dispense entirely with external law. Because grace became available in the humanity of Christ it is fittingly communicated and expressed by men in bodily actions.<sup>49</sup> These external actions, to the extent that they are

"*Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 101, a. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, aa. 2-3; q. 102, a. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 103, a. 1. On the basis of this remark of St. Thomas one could find a meaning and value in the liturgies of non-Christian religions, even in the present day.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 101, a. 2; q. 103, a. 3. On the need for truthfulness in liturgical signs cf. II-II, q. 93, a. 1.

" I-II, q. 103, a. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 106, a. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 108, a. 1.

necessary for the gaining and right use of grace, become the object of legislation in the New Testament. For the gaining of grace divine law brings the sacraments into existence.<sup>50</sup> Although the shape of these sacraments was prefigured in the ceremonies of the Old Law,<sup>51</sup> their objective reality is quite different. They contain the justifying grace of God. The liturgies of the Old Law could carry the faith and charity of God's People forward to Christ and so play a part in their justification; but they could not objectively embody the grace of Christ, because Christ did not yet actually exist.<sup>52</sup> Because they contain Christ, the sacraments of the New Law are the work of God both as legislator and giver of grace.

But what is true of the sacraments need not be true of the totality of Christian liturgy. St. Thomas, in fact, says that, apart from the institution of the sacraments, there is no divine legislation about worship in the New Testament. Other ceremonies do not give grace and are not given by God.<sup>53</sup> He sees the detailed ceremonial of the Old Law fulfilled, not in Christian liturgy (in spite of many similarities) but in the life of Christ or in acts of Christian virtue.<sup>54</sup> In taking this line St. Thomas would seem to be supporting the separation of sacraments from liturgy, of sanctification from worship. It is here, however, that one must be sensitive to the categories in which St. Thomas presents his thought and remember that he is analysing the New Law, not in isolation but in contrast with the Old. When he says, in effect, that there are no ceremonial precepts in the New Law he is not saying that there is no place for ceremonial. The New Law legislates for the human actions by which we are introduced to grace and by which we use grace aright. If the sacraments are necessary for the giving of grace, then their use is necessary for those who would have grace. The New Law requires participation in the sacraments.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 102, a. 5 ad 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 103, a. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 108, a. 2 and ad 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 102, aa. 2-5, especially in replies to the objections.

It also requires that this participation should take the form of worship. The moral precept of worship has not been abrogated in the New Law, and obedience to it is an essential requirement for the reception of grace. And while this worship is essentially an interior attitude, it has to take external ceremonial form. St. Thomas denies none of this. What he does deny is that there are any specific ceremonies, other than the basic ritual of the sacraments, that are necessarily required for worship under the law of grace. The response of worship must be made with all the liberty, personal initiative and pursuit of reasonableness that marks the law of the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup> The individual conscience has its rights here. But because grace is given and used concretely in the Christian community, there will be a place for human legislation. St. Thomas takes it for granted in his sacramental theology that, while the Church has no right to interfere with the essentials of sacraments, it has the right to legislate for their liturgical use and the ritual in which they are solemnized. Here he mentions the special authority of the "Sancti Patres" in the determination of Christian worship,<sup>76</sup> and also the rights of prelates;<sup>77</sup> and when he is dealing with the subjective moral values of worship he shows how seriously the obligations arising from this human liturgical legislation must be taken.<sup>78</sup> Yet he counsels moderation in liturgical law "so as not to burden the way of life of the faithful."<sup>79</sup> And by presenting it as the work of human legislators he frees it from the burdensome absoluteness that went with the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law.<sup>80</sup>

Those who are interested in the renewal and reshaping of the Church's liturgy will be encouraged by this teaching of St. Thomas on the human provenance, and therefore on the rela-

\*' *Ibid.*, q. 108, a. 1 and ad 2. On the reasonableness of the New Law in contrast to the Old cf. q. 102, a. 1 ad 1.

" *Ibid.*, q. 107, a. 4.

" *Ibid.*, q. 108, aa. 2-8.

" II-II, qq. 93, 94, 99.

I-II, q. 107, a. 4: "ne conversatio fidelium onerosa reddatur."

" Note, for example, the difference he sees between the obligation of observing Sunday and observing the Sabbath in II-II, q. 122, a. 4 ad 4.

tivity, of most liturgical law. But from the theological standpoint it would seem that he is making the liturgy much less the work of God. Again, however, one has to keep the context of St. Thomas's statements in mind. The reason there is so little divine liturgical law in the New Testament is that grace is now available in Christ. The more grace abounds the less need there is of law. New Testament man can be trusted to worship God without much guidance from divine law. He can be trusted as an individual because he is transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, perfected by the virtue of religion and inspired by the gift of piety.<sup>61</sup> But more importantly, he can be trusted insofar as he belongs to the community of the Church. When one remembers that the ecclesiology of St. Thomas is primarily an ecclesiology of grace<sup>62</sup> and that acts of the Church are acts of grace, one can appreciate why he sees so little need for its life to be arranged in detail by divine law. The worship that New Testament man produces, provided it is done within the order of the Church, is the work of grace. And the work of grace is more effectively divine than the work of law. New Testament liturgy, for all its freedom and man-made forms, is the work of God far more profoundly than was the liturgy of the Old Law.

As an illustration of how the theological categories of law and grace are used by St. Thomas to give a profound explanation of the mystery of the liturgy it is worth looking again at his sacramental theology. At the heart of his analysis of sacraments he has a question entitled *De Causis Sacramentorum*?<sup>3</sup> He is isolating the actual causes that bring a sacrament, as defined formally in previous questions, into real existence. In other words, he is looking at an actual liturgy

<sup>61</sup>III-H, q. 121 It is to the gift of piety that St. Thomas attributes the trinitarian quality of the Christian's worship.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Yves Congar, O. P., "*Ecclesia et Populus (Fidelis)* dans l'Ecclesiologie de S. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1974) vol. 1, pp. 159-174.

"*Summa Theol.*, H1, q. 64.

of the Church and asking what agents are at work to make this to be a sacrament of the New Law. Before asking about the minister, the Church, the Apostles, Christ, he asks about the action of God. He studies this on two levels, of interior action and of institution.<sup>®4</sup> This corresponds to the double pattern of grace and law that he has found in God's salvific action in the *Prima Secundae*. To situate the question of the institution of sacraments in this context is to make it a genuinely theological rather than a merely apologetical issue. It is to ask, not have individual sacraments been divinely instituted but why and to what extent a sacrament has to be so. And the answer, that a sacrament has to be from God because he is the one whose *virtus* is present in the sacrament, joins the sacramental expression firmly to the *virtus* that is at work. God acts within and without, in a balanced presence of law and grace. The power of the sacraments to cause grace is likewise better understood when seen within the general pattern of grace-giving and its relationship to liturgical law in the New Testament. The causality of the sacraments is not a surreptitious, unannounced intervention by God but a visible offer made in a way that gives man the opportunity for a congenial, personal response. The external shape corresponds to the internal movement: and both are from God. The importance of liturgical celebration is also clarified. The distinction that St. Thomas makes between what is "de necessitate sacramenti" and what is "ad quendam solemnitatem"<sup>®5</sup> may seem to be restricting the work of God to the essential matter and form. But when one remembers that what he is excluding from the New Law of grace is not the exercise of worship or the need for some external forms of it but simply the divinely imposed necessity of this or that particular form, one can be satisfied that liturgical self-expression of the Christian community is an integral part of the economy of grace. As St. Thomas makes

<sup>®</sup> *Ibid.*, aa. 1-2.

*Ibid.*, q. 64, a. 2 ad 1.

clear in his formal analysis of grace, everything that prepares man for grace and enables him to cooperate with it and act externally in accordance with it is itself produced by God's grace.<sup>66</sup> Hence the full liturgical celebration of sacraments is the work of God, not as the product of divine law but as the product of divine grace. While the presence of grace in a sacrament depends indubitably on the making of a divinely instituted sign, the taking hold of grace requires the creative liturgical response of the Christian community. The Church's freedom to create an appropriate liturgical setting for the sacraments is the grace-assured freedom of the children of God.

### *Theological definition of Liturgy*

The conclusion suggested by our examination of St. Thomas's treatment of liturgical material is that he would prefer a definition of the liturgy to begin with a strictly theological idea rather than an anthropological one such as worship or sign, or a christological one such as priesthood. God has to be brought into the definition of liturgy somehow. The definitions we have already examined do so by way of specific difference—qualifying, for example, the generic notion of sign by the notion of divine institution. But it does seem more sensible in a theological definition to make the divine to be the generic element rather than the specific difference. To define liturgy as “the work of God” or “the action of God” takes one immediately to the ontological reality of the mystery one is defining. One could then go on to qualify this action of God as one which, for example, appears in a system of signs which sanctify members of the Church for the worship of the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The qualifying details of such a definition would need to be worked out and balanced more carefully. The only point at issue here is that these details should be qualifications rather than starting points, and that the first thing a theologian should say about liturgy is that it is the action of God.

To describe liturgy as an action of God . . . can, of course,

<sup>66</sup> I-II, q. 109, a. 6; q. III, aa. 2-3.



be a form of intellectual and pastoral escapism. In mundane matters or in a purely secularist ideology to call something an act of God can mean that we simply do not understand it or can do nothing about it. But in a theologian like St. Thomas "act of God" is an expression of neither agnosticism nor irresponsibility. It is not agnosticism, myth or metaphor because his explanation of how liturgy is the work of God as lawgiver and giver of grace is rooted in a careful metaphysical analysis of the action of God on his creatures, and particularly on man. [his study of divine government in *Prima Pars* sets out to justify and explain how God is present and active in all things, and how his action on intelligent creatures occurs both on the level of interior transformation of mind and will as well as on the level of external presentation of images and motivation.®] Indeed his complex analysis of what would today be called interpersonal relationships (involving different combinations of God, angels, men, and things), and the place of signs in this, offers a fascinating groundwork for understanding the personalist dimension that so interests contemporary liturgists. These patterns of divine government are in turn an application of St. Thomas's more fundamental analysis of God, his providence, the work of creation and the kind of relationship that exists between God and his creatures. The fact that God is, that he gives himself out of sheer goodness to others, that he directs these others to participate in his goodness by predestinating providence are the ultimate presuppositions for his theological interpretation of the liturgy. Some of them are more immediately relevant to the liturgy than others. For example, the discussion on the names of God §§ has a bearing on the evaluation of prayer language in the liturgy. The credibility of the trinitarian pattern of liturgy is supported by the establishment of basic trinitarian dogma, and the correlation of the visible mission of the Word with the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit shows how the pattern of visible shape and in-

" Cf. I, q. 105, aa. 8-4.

""*Ibid.*, q. 13.

visible grace found in the New Testament liturgy (law and grace in St. Thomas's terms) is grounded on the trinitarian economy of salvation.<sup>69</sup> The explanation of the purpose of creation as the communication of God's goodness provides the basic key for understanding how in promoting the glory of God liturgy is not benefitting God but perfecting his creatures.<sup>70</sup>

Nor does defining liturgy as the action of God undermine the pastoral responsibility of men for the actual carrying out of liturgy. The basic anthropology of St. Thomas presents man as a creature who is master of his own destiny. Made as he is in the image of God he has a capacity for the gift of personal relationship with God, freely accepted and pursued in accordance with the psychological and moral structure of his own nature and his essential dependence on community.<sup>71</sup> Man's self-perfecting action is no less his own, no less free, no less typically human for being exercised under the sovereign promotion of God. It is no less personal for being worked out within patterns set by human law. Man's existential situation as sinner does not alter the essential pattern of his relationship with God but rather accentuates its humanness. The place of the body in liturgy, the remedial redemptive necessity of Christian liturgy, the need for conscious, deliberate correspondence with the grace it offers, the worshipful use of its forms whether they are given by divine law or created by human ingenuity—all this is justified and made intelligible by the general anthropological options of St. Thomas such as they appear, for example in the *Prima Pars* and *Prima Secundae*.

This is not the place to debate the value of these fundamental theological and anthropological positions of St. Thomas in any detail or to fully explore their relevance to liturgy. They are listed simply to show that from the very beginning of his theology St. Thomas is saying things which take account of and provide a method for understanding the liturgical material

" *Ibid.*, q. 48.

" *Ibid.*, q. 44, a. 4; cf. II-II, q. 81, a. 7.

711, q. 93; cf. I-II prologue.

which he will encounter in his progressive exploration of all the principles, values, and historical happenings that make up the existential relationship between God and his creation. And since it is in the Christian liturgy that this relationship is being worked out in the final phase of salvation history, one can claim that he offers a method of thinking theologically about—if not a self-contained theology of—the liturgy.

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